Current Services Under Public Health Addressing Nutrition and Nutritional Needs of Undernourished Children

July 1990

Senior Nutrition Consultant
Health Promotion/
Disease Prevention

31-05679/

Current Services Addressing
Nutrition and Nutritional Needs

Focus: Undernourished Children

Response to this issue depends on what causes children to be undernourished. There are several common causes:

a) poverty
b) personal choice to be thin stimulated by peer pressure/society/health concerns of family
c) skipping meals/lack of time/lack of parental supervision and support
d) controlling normal weight gain to participate in sports or dance.

Nutrition is an issue of concern through many stages in growth and development from prenatal, infant and early childhood, school age to adolescence. It is an important issue in social development, educational development as well as future well being.

Focus: Food Programs for Hungry Children

Issue: a) Poverty

Current programs are community based and locally supported by volunteer groups.

Free Milk -- Three school boards, Bathurst, Grand Falls and Saint John provide milk for "needy" children or poor students, in the first three grades of school.

Referral: by teachers and principals
Funding source: Service Clubs, N.B. Home Economics Association, Protestant Orphanage Fund
Cost: In Saint John, 1000 students are served at a cost of $25,000 per year or until the money runs out. Usually there is difficulty making ends meet by the end of the school year. School District 20 only is served in this manner. A second school district in the Saint John area receives a subsidy for milk for needy children from this fund.

Nearly Free Meals -- Jacquet River Junior High School. The local Lions Club in Dalhousie N.B. provides meals daily for 35-40 students in a church basement near the school. Cost to students is about 30 cents or according to what the child can afford.

Referral: by teachers
Funding source: Service Club

Free Lunches -- All children who cannot afford lunch usually get a lunch. Individual schools respond to isolated cases of children coming to school without lunch. There are probably 3-5 students in approximately half the schools. It is difficult to estimate if the reason is that parents cannot afford to buy enough food for the child. Many children eat their lunch at recess or on the way to school and then are hungry and tired halfway through the afternoon.

Schools with lunch programs often provide the lunch and absorb the cost when a child with a problem is identified.

In Saint John two of the schools in the center of the city, St. Joseph and Prince Charles, refer 35 - 40 children to a free lunch program sponsored by the local Boys and Girls Club which is adjacent to the schools. Funding is raised through the efforts of the Boys and Girls club.

Children access free food at schools through the observations of teachers who refer them to sources of food.

Informal Programs -- virtually all schools will provide something for children to eat if they are hungry.

- Home and School groups provide funds,
- teachers provide juice, peanut butter, cheese and items such as Alphagetti (no lunch program in school),
- some individual teachers supply lunches,
- I.O.D.E provides a quantity of boxes of Cup-of-Soup,
- children share lunches,
- canteen profit underwrites the cost of food for needy children.

Conclusion:
No formal programs exist for large numbers of hungry children. The numbers in each school district are small and dispersed throughout the schools in each district making formal programs impractical. Saint John Boys and Girls Club program is the closest to a formal program.

The community seems to take an interest in this issue and needs appear to be met on an ad hoc approach. Whether there are needs going unmet it is difficult to determine.

Focus: Health

Issues b),c) & d) Lifestyle Concerns Impacting on Health

Department of Health and Community Services
Public Health -- Nutrition Services

.Services currently offered within Public Health are addressing the causes b), c) & d) above. There are 6.5 nutritionists positions (6 currently filled) in public health regions in

the province and one in central office Health Promotion/ Disease Prevention Unit.

.The role of the nutritionist is to act as a consultant on nutrition issues in the community, identifying population need regarding these issues, planning and developing programs and supporting educational resources with public health staff to resolve these problems, and to provide support and consultation to community groups and other health professionals involved in local initiatives and departmental provincial programs. While access to nutritious food and food security is a major concern for nutritionists it is not the focus of current work. Work within Public Health Regions focus on:

1. Nutrition Education/Health Promotion

The focus is on preventing chronic disease through the improvement of lifestyle habits. Health promotion activities that promote healthy eating are provided through:

. nutrition instruction to mothers during pregnancy,
. infant feeding -- through well child clinics by public health nurses,
. preschool nutrition advice -- through preschool clinics
. support to teachers with up-to-date educational information resources and school food eating habit surveys on request.

2. Consulting/Monitoring on School Food Service and Menus

. A school food policy is being developed to improve the availability of more nutritious foods in schools.
. A survey of 90% of the schools in New Brunswick has just been completed to determine what is being offered. A brief summary of this survey is provided in the Appendix. Results show that:
  a) There is a major increase in food available in schools with only 26 schools reporting that they didn't have lunch programs, canteens, supplement programs or a vending machine.
  b) There is a major increase in the serving of French fries and items high in sugar and salt.
  c) There is a good selection of nutritious food items in 57% of the schools which have daily or 4 day a week lunch programs
  d) 18% of the schools have a lunch program one day a week--usually hot dogs, pizza or food from a local "take out".

Food is offered in schools for reasons other than to serve hungry children. Many schools use the sale of food items for fund raising purposes. However for the most part the price of food appears to be reasonable.(see list of common prices). Only one

school in the survey appears to offer milk at a subsidized cost of 25 cents to all students.

3. Surveys of school students (2 separate surveys)

The issue of eating habits was investigated in the Acadian Peninsula and in Charlotte County.

a) Breakfast

Issue Eating Breakfast	Acadian Pen.	Charlotte Co.
	Grades 10,11&12 942 students	Grade 6 357 Students
Regular Breakfast Eating	72% (5-7 days/wk)	56% (5 school days)
Do not usually eat breakfast	28%	44%

Reasons for not eating breakfast in Charlotte Co. were:

- not hungry 57%
- not enough time 17%
- trying to loose weight 7%
- other reasons 19%

b) Loosing Weight

The Acadian Pen. Survey looked at students trying to loose weight.

- 24% said they sometimes deprive themselves of food to loose weight.(total students surveyed)
- 30% of grade 12 students reported depriving themselves
- 20% of grade 10 & 11 students
- 35.5% more girls than boys deprived themselves of food.

The method used to loose weight was:

- 6% said they didn't eat at all
- 25.6% said they ate a lot less than normal
- 33% reduced the amount of food they ate by 50%
- 22% reduced the amount of food they ate by 75%
- 13% reduced the amount of food by 90%

The possibility of gaining weight scared 48% of the students from moderately to enormously.

c) Eating Lunch

The Charlotte Co. survey asked students if they ate lunch.

. 86% reported they usually ate lunch
. 93% reported that they ate lunch on the day of the survey

The reasons for not eating lunch most frequently stated were:
. not hungry 4%
. didn't prepare or forgot lunch 1.5%
. not enough money to buy lunch 1 student

The type of lunch:
. 69% included non nutritious "extras" as lunch items (commonly pop, chips, mini sips, candy and sweet cookies)
. Of those including "extras" in their lunch 62% had 2 or more servings of extras.

4. Consultation with Departmental Day Care Coordinators

Consultation is provided on an ad hoc basis when problems arise concerning the quality of food provided children in Day Care facilities in the province. Some review of menus is done and recommendations made. Public Health does not have enough nutritionists to provide adequate consultation services to this program. Improvement in the guidelines for food service to children in day care is required. Education and training of day care staff and parent awareness of what children are being fed in these facilities is necessary. Additional nutrition professional staff is required to resolve the problem.

Day care workers are aware that some children are not being well fed when they leave the facility. In these cases they provide the child with a sandwich or snack before they leave for the day. Children who are dropped off in the morning without breakfast are often provided with a small breakfast as well.

Expansion Services Required

Non Government:

. Seed money required for community development. Special projects to assist specific target groups such as women with children living on low incomes to improve their capability in preparing food and purchasing on a low income.

A project was recently presented from the Mapleton Food Bank in Moncton for a group meal preparation project that would improve the nutrition for several families. This project had some community funding but was asked to obtain more. A similar project has recently been very effective in Montreal in improving purchasing power of the dollar for larger quantities of food, overcoming limitations due to lack of kitchen equipment and cooking expertise. The participants in the program became more effective in managing limited money, knowledgeable in choosing nutritious food and food preparation.

Government:

. Reduction in the gap between income support and actual cost of food, shelter and fuel is necessary to remove the problem of hunger caused by poverty. This would remove the necessity for food banks and feeding projects.

. Community development workers are needed to stimulate action in the community. This takes a great deal of energy as the public has a tendency to feel that government should provide.

. Money is required for projects which provide counselling and nutrition support for low income mothers to improve pregnancy outcome. Low birthweight babies continue to have more physical and mental development problems than those of normal weight. Poor nutrition during pregnancy may have a life long impact.

. Current number of nutritionists in public health is insufficient to provide services directly to the public in the large health regions of the province -- Region 1 - Moncton, Region 2 Saint John, Region 3 Fredericton and Region 6 Bathurst.
The Department of Health and Community services needs to increase the number of nutritionists from the current 6.5 positions to 14 positions at the field level to manage community projects and assist communities to develop initiatives to resolve nutrition/hunger problems. This increase would bring the complement in line with the minimum recommended by Health and Welfare for 1 nutritionist for 50,000 population.

Nutrition issues in the Department of Health and Community Services are a low budget priority under Public Health. Additional positions to provide services to all Health Regions have been proposed but higher priorities in Public Health have had to be considered. Under times of restraint, the nutrition service has been held to below minimum level to meet the growing concerns in nutrition.

Additional staffing is required for nutrition issues in Day Care. At least two nutrition provincial consultants, one for the North and one for the South, are required to improve the standard of nutrition/food in day care facilities in the province.

. Home Economists are employed to provide direct service to the public on food buying and food preparation. Currently there are a small number employed (7.5 positions with 6 currently filled) in the Department of Health and Community Services, focusing their work according to the regional issues for low income families around managing income.

. Community awareness of hunger is necessary to stimulate interest. Projects should be initiated and highlighted as successful with credit given to communities for helping to resolve the problems. Money for projects could be made available from municipal governments to give local credibility to activity for stimulating non government action.

APPENDIX

School Food Prices in 1989-90 Survey

School Food Items -- Range of prices N=38 schools

Item	Price Range	Common Price
full meals	.75 - 2.50	1.50
French fries lge.	.90 - 1.50	1.40
hamburger	.50 - 1.25	1.00
cheeseburger	.05 - .10	over regular hamburger
sandwiches	.80 - 1.75	1.00
pizza	.50 - 2.00	1.00
French fries sm.	.75 - .80	.75
hot dogs	.50 - 1.00	.75
potato chips	.55 - .75	.75
yogurt	.60 - .80	.60
chocolate milk	.50 - .70	.55
ice cream	.45 - .85	.55
fruit	.30 - .70	.50
doughnuts	.30 - .60	.50
small green salad	.40 - 1.00	.50
soup	.50 - 1.00	.50
white milk	.25 - .65	.50
juice	.25 - .60	.50
dessert	.25 - .70	.50
muffin	.25 - .50	.50
egg roll & sce.	.50 - .80	.50
cheese & crackers	.40 - .55	.45 - .50

other items:	
pop 7 oz.	.55
12 oz.	.75
popocorn	.45
minisips	.25
chocolate bars	.75
gum	.70
carrot & celery	.45